

CoBRA STRIKES

AT WARRIOR TRAINING

Mr. James Prater, HQ AFCESA/CEXD

Predeployment course at CoBRA ensures EOD Airmen are trained and lethal

In February, a group of EOD Airmen completed the first Combat Battlefield Ready Airman (CoBRA) class and deployed directly from the Silver Flag Exercise Site (SFES) at Tyndall AFB, Fla., to Southwest Asia. At CoBRA, class leaders quickly formed their students into the same teams they would be in the AOR, and during the 20-day course, the teams trained on scenarios tailored specifically to their deployed location. They did this despite the fact that on Friday of their first week at CoBRA, the teams received notification from USAFCENT that not only had their deployment location changed but also the theater of operations. Less than 24 hours into the weekend, the CoBRA staff rearranged the curriculum and scenarios to reflect not only the new theater of operations, but the specific location as well.

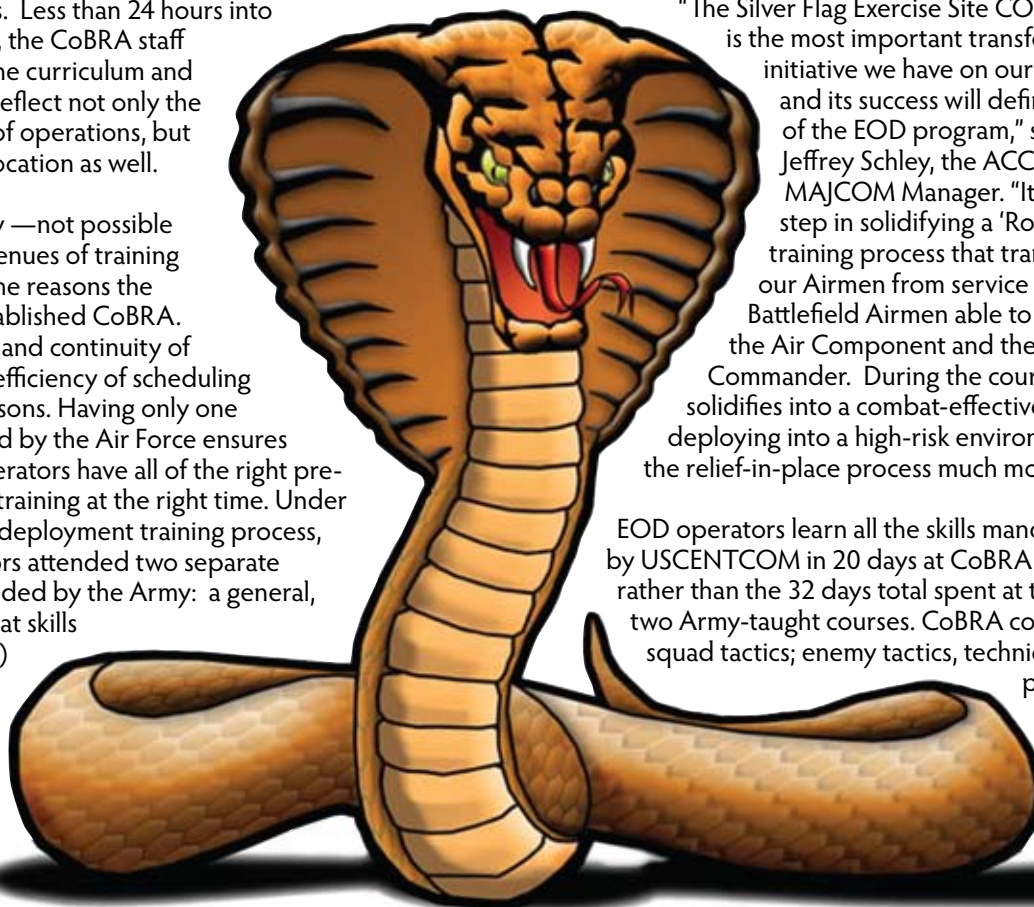
This flexibility —not possible at previous venues of training — is one of the reasons the Air Force established CoBRA. Effectiveness and continuity of training and efficiency of scheduling are other reasons. Having only one course for and by the Air Force ensures that EOD operators have all of the right pre-deployment training at the right time. Under the prior predeployment training process, EOD operators attended two separate courses provided by the Army: a general, 18-day combat skills training (CST) class at one of the U.S. Army Power Projection Platforms

in CONUS and the 14-day GATOR (EOD expeditionary mission) training at Redstone Arsenal, Ala. Often there would be significant intervals of time between CST and GATOR and between GATOR and deployment. The first guaranteed opportunity for EOD personnel to come together as an integrated team was at the deployed location during the "left-seat-right-seat" mission spin-up period. CoBRA changes all that.

In March 2007, Air Staff, HQ AFCESA, and HQ ACC EOD functionals began working plans to move all EOD predeployment training to a consolidated venue. During this same time, at a Civil Engineer Readiness Board-sponsored IPT, the EOD working group identified significant gaps in current training venues and documented the need to develop a more robust program at Tyndall's SFES or at another Air Force venue.

"The Silver Flag Exercise Site COBRA course is the most important transformational initiative we have on our (EOD) plate and its success will define the future of the EOD program," said CMSgt Jeffrey Schley, the ACC/A7XE EOD MAJCOM Manager. "It's the first step in solidifying a 'Road-to-War' training process that transforms our Airmen from service support to Battlefield Airmen able to support both the Air Component and the Joint Force Commander. During the course, the unit solidifies into a combat-effective unit prior to deploying into a high-risk environment, making the relief-in-place process much more effective."

EOD operators learn all the skills mandated by USCENTCOM in 20 days at CoBRA training, rather than the 32 days total spent at the previous two Army-taught courses. CoBRA covers small squad tactics; enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures; current threat IEDs, Mine Resistant



Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles, shoot targets out to 1000 meters; and communications training.

Some of the favorite classes are Combat Lifesaver and Joint Tactics. With Combat Lifesaver, EOD operators are taught the skills needed to save each other during any operation. This includes sniper fire, small arms, shrapnel, and large explosions. Then using the MEDIVAC 9-line procedure learned during Joint Tactics they will correctly call in the items needed to get support when and where needed. CoBRA refreshes Airmen's skills on Counter Improvised Explosive Defeat-related topics, trains on new and deployed equipment not maintained at home station, and culminates in a four-day field training exercise where all their learned skills are tested to make sure they are ready.

Success at CoBRA depends on each individual's home station training status. The main purpose of CoBRA training is to raise the knowledge and skill levels of all EOD technicians to a standard, but higher, level. The only way this will be accomplished is if everyone is completely up-to-date on their home station training.

With approximately 20 instructors – five military and the rest contract personnel — CoBRA has an enviable student-to-instructor ratio. The military jobs are all deployable positions; this allows military instructors to stay current with AOR-related mission requirements. The contract instructors (all former military) provide continuity. The group includes former Navy Corpsmen and Army Special Operation Forces personnel, so that students are well prepared to work in a joint environment.

The Air Force EOD program is currently supporting a high – and increasing – number of requests for forces. In fact, over the last three years, support to the Southwest Asia theater of operations has increased 100%, and some ranks are experiencing a 1:1 dwell. With this high operations tempo, it's very important that predeployment training build upon home station training to be efficient and effective.

"CoBRA provides two distinct improvements - it consolidates training while increasing the vital teamwork and cohesion so critical to our EOD Airman on the battlefield," said Col Robert Staib, Chief of HQ ACC's Readiness Division. "We have turned our war prep from a pick-up game to team training, ensuring Airmen are more prepared than ever to go into the fight together. You're seeing continuous process improvement at its finest."

Students finishing CoBRA and heading for the AOR hold the same view. "CoBRA is absolutely 100% spot on," said recent graduate Capt Jeff England, 1 CES, Langley AFB, Va. "It's very obvious that the CoBRA cadre put a lot of effort into providing the best training possible."

Mr. Prater, a contractor, provides support as the EOD Contingency Training Program manager, HQ AFCEA, Tyndall AFB, Fla.



During the 20-day CoBRA class, students participate in a variety of training, including (top to bottom) firing at 1,000-meter targets (actual distance); HMMWV Egress Assistance Training; actual combat scenarios (30 total); and instruction and live firing of the turret-mounted M240/b. (photos by Mr. Guy Ivie [third from top] and Mr. Jim Monhollon)